



October 8, 1996

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 1350, the "Maritime Security Act of 1996." This Act sets the course for America's merchant marine into the 21st century.

The American flag must always sail in the sea lanes of the world. In recent years, our country has again been reminded of the critical role played by the U.S. merchant marine in protecting our interests and the security of our allies. The enactment of this legislation is the culmination of a long, bipartisan effort. It will ensure that the United States will continue to have American flag ships crewed by loyal American citizen merchant mariners to meet our Nation's economic and sealift defense requirements.

The American merchant marine is an important component of the sealift needed by the Department of Defense. By contracting with the owners and operators of U.S.-flag commercial vessels, the Government will gain access to a fleet of modern commercial ships, along with the sophisticated intermodal transportation system supporting it. The Government also assures that the seafaring men and women who crew these commercial ships in peacetime will be available to crew the Government's reserve sealift ships in times of crisis.

This Act extends to seafarers the same basic reemployment rights that apply to reserve members of our Armed Forces in time of war or national emergency. American merchant mariners have always responded to the call in times of crisis, and they deserve the assurance that their peacetime jobs will be there when they return.

The Maritime Security Act will protect American jobs and maintain a U.S. presence in international maritime trade, ensuring that vital imports and exports are delivered in both

peacetime and wartime. The Act reaffirms our Nation's resolve to maintain a strong U.S.-flag presence on the high seas for our continued national security and economic growth.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

THE WHITE HOUSE,
October 8, 1996.

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